

Scrutiny Annual Report 2025/6

Exeter City Council



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Foreword from the Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Board



Cllr Matthew Williams
Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Board
(2025/26)

March 2026

The role of Scrutiny is to provide support, challenge and to maximise the effectiveness of Exeter City Council and its working relationships with its partners across the local and wider communities it serves.

The two Scrutiny Committees have continued to take a proactive approach to matters concerning the Council and its residents, to support the Council and make a positive contribution to work in the city. The Scrutiny Programme Board supported by the Democratic Services Team have overseen more change during this year including a new scrutiny committee Chair and changes within the Democratic Services Team.

The Scrutiny Programme Board was set up to meet on a bi-annual basis but have continued to meet quarterly to provide oversight and direction on the work of scrutiny. The meetings are attended by the Chairs and Deputy Chairs with the aim of developing a future programme of work, reviewing any Scrutiny Proposals submitted by Members on the pro-forma, and support best practice for both of the scrutiny committees.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Scrutiny Committee Members, and our partners for their continued support in contributing to the scrutiny process as well as officers and the Democratic Services Team in facilitating the operation of the Board and the Committees.

Introduction

The Annual Scrutiny Report for Exeter City Council provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Strategic Scrutiny Committee and Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee during the 2025/26 year.

Scrutiny is a key tool for promoting the best interests and wellbeing of the area and seeks to ensure that local people receive high quality services that meet their needs. The two Scrutiny Committees act as a critical friend to the Executive, hold it to account and provide challenge where deemed necessary. Scrutiny has a vital role in reviewing policy development and advising the Executive of areas for potential improvements. The work of the two Scrutiny Committees supports the Council in the work undertaken to achieve the aims of the Council's corporate priorities.

The aims of the Scrutiny process are to:

- Add value to Council business and decision-making
- Hold the Executive to account
- To monitor the budget and performance of services
- Assist the Council in the development of policy and review the effectiveness of the implementation of Council policy
- To review relevant Government policy development and legislation to assess the impact on the City and make recommendations to Executive.

The two Scrutiny Committees of Strategic and Customer Focus discharge the functions conferred by Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 or regulations under section 32 of the Local Government Act 2000.

Continuing to highlight the role of scrutiny:

- Committee Members who are not Members of the largest political group of the Council are encouraged to submit requests for consideration of scrutiny to the Scrutiny Programme Board using the Scrutiny Proposal Form as it is important that Scrutiny Committees are led by Members and are responsible for setting their own work programme and taking into account the views of all Members
- Appointing Deputy Chairs of Scrutiny Committees to Chair any Task and Finish Groups or Spotlight Reviews, as and when established
- Portfolio Holders report to scrutiny committees to update Members on activities within their portfolio
- There is a page on the Councillor Hub devoted to scrutiny providing Members with supporting information and guidance to assist them in good scrutiny practice.

The Council's Scrutiny Committees continue to have an important role in relation to the development of the Council's budget and policy framework, as well as to make recommendations to the Executive on matters within their terms of reference. Members have access to the Council's Forward Plan and where there is a need for Scrutiny consideration following an Executive decision to bring the matter to Committee first via the Call-In process.

This report serves as a reminder to Members of their responsibilities and powers and re-iterates the importance of Scrutiny being Member-led. The Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Programme Board can be found on Page 269 of the Constitution.

Scrutiny Programme Board

Scrutiny Programme Board



Chair - Cllr Matthew Williams

The Scrutiny Programme Board is formed of the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the two Scrutiny Committees:

Strategic Scrutiny Committee



Chair - Cllr Liz Pole



Deputy Chair - Cllr Kevin Mitchell

Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee



Chair - Cllr Catherine Rees



Deputy Chair - Cllr James Cookson

Looking back over the previous year 2024-2025

- Public information has been updated for clarity, on Exeter City Council website, regarding the Community Lottery following a Customer Focus Scrutiny Session.

Year in Review: Strategic Scrutiny Committee 2025-2026

- The Strategic Scrutiny Committee has met on seven occasions during the municipal year 2025/26, including one special meeting.
- There were no call-in requests during this period.
- There was a recommendation made to the Executive with regard to an item on Unauthorised Encampments.
- One petition was referred to the committee by Council entitled Save Northbrook Pool.

Year in Review: Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee 2025-2026

- The Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee has met on seven occasions during the municipal year 2025/26.
- No call-in requests were received during this period.
- There were recommendations made to the Executive with regard to items on Potential Closure of Northbrook Pool, Box-shifting and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFT).
- One petition was referred to the committee by Council entitled To extend Article 4 direction to include all of Hillcrest Park and Doriam Close.

Strategic Scrutiny

Responsibility for:

- Relevant policies in the Exeter Plan
- Corporate Health & Safety
- Response to Central Government's Policy Making
- Climate change and sustainability
- Council wide/strategic matters
- Hear call-ins relevant to the role of the committee

TOPIC	IMPACT
UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS	SMB Review of viability and impact of a negotiated stopping policy underway. Evidence from stakeholders and community groups input to inform protocol review.
PETITION ARTICLE 4	A petition by residents will be held in order to inform any future Article 4 review.
AIR QUALITY MOTION	Members informed the scope of Council's air quality strategy consultation. Timestamped further scrutiny.
CARBON DESCENT REPORT	Current trajectory terminology would be used in future reports in place of business as usual.
CITY WIDE NET ZERO	Links would be made with the county nature recovery strategy.
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION	Member feedback shaped the submission.

Feedback from other Members of the committee:

TOPIC	IMPACT
AIR QUALITY MOTION	Good to enable formal members involvement in the start of this process.
UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS	This was the most meaningful session we've looked at - listening to residents' concerns with the petition, hearing from travellers' advocates and the recommendation for a negotiated stopping policy was a positive outcome.

Feedback from the Strategic Management Board:

TOPIC	IMPACT
SHARED PROSPERITY FUND	Balanced discussion about priorities.
MARKETS & STREET TRADING IN EXETER	Enabled good understanding of current situation in Exeter.
CARBON DESCENT REPORT	Detailed presentation about the costs of de-carbonisation.
CITYWIDE NET ZERO	Appreciation of the wide range of activity with partners to tackle net zero.
AIR QUALITY	A thorough scrutiny assessment of the approach to the Air Quality management and the consensus to produce an Air Quality Strategy this year.
PETITION ARTICLE 4	Petition – to Extend Article 4 Direction to include all of Hillcrest & Doriam Close. Understanding this would not have the desired outcomes.

Customer Focus

Responsibility for:

- Corporate Performance Monitoring
- Financial Performance Monitoring
- Annual Budget Setting Process
- Service specific/operational matters
- Hear call-ins relevant to the role of the committee

TOPIC	IMPACT
NORTHBROOK POOL PETITION	Community Asset Transfer policy has been reviewed and updated.
BUDGET & MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP)	<p>Improved clarity of understanding of Scrutiny's role in the year spend and the MTFP.</p> <p>Cross party recommendations were considered by the Executive and taken into account, informing thinking. Budget planning input into the MTFP will be informed by resident's surveys.</p> <p>Improved understanding of all aspects of budget monitoring and setting.</p> <p>Police met with Inclusive Exeter to improve understanding and engagement.</p> <p>Young people's voices were heard and as a result the Deputy Leader is establishing a youth panel.</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder now meets regularly with City Centre Councillors which feeds directly into the Community Safety Partnership.</p> <p>Widening Public Participation in key city centre issues. Community Safety Partnership will provide an annual report.</p>
ASB IN CITY CENTRE	Base line publicly established, so that progress can be measured year on year.
KEY PEOPLE ACTIVITY ACROSS THE COUNCIL	
BOX SHIFTING.	Cross party shaping of recommendations for the Executive Committee.

Feedback from other Members of the committee:

TOPIC	IMPACT
NORTHBROOK POOL PETITION	This enabled residents to be heard.
ASB IN THE CITY CENTRE	The result was a very illuminating meeting in which residents, including younger people, finally felt heard. Work on ASB in the city centre has progressed outside of Scrutiny between ward cllrs and the Deputy Leader of the Council. This work is effective collaboration.
KEY PEOPLE ACTIVITY ACROSS THE COUNCIL	This report was very illuminating and held the promise of hopeful change going forwards. Outlined is a big programme of work, which will be very positive.
BUDGET	Proposals were put forward by Scrutiny which was a positive step, a peppercorn rent for Citizens Advice had already been progressed.
MTFP	Clear setting out of the MTFP and opportunity to get clarity regarding mechanics of the financial plan and underlying priorities.
BOX SHIFTING	Greater transparency of the situation for Exeter and the resulting reduction in income coming to the Council than should be the case.

Feedback from the Strategic Management Board:

TOPIC	IMPACT
NORTHBROOK POOL PETITION	Positive suggestion to explore community running of the pool with the Trust, which was taken on board by Executive.
ASB IN THE CITY CENTRE	Heard real life experiences from a range of people in the city.
KEY PEOPLE ACTIVITY ACROSS THE COUNCIL	Positive feedback from the committee was welcomed by the HR Team.
MTFP	The format was further refined, leading to scrutiny proposals being considered during budget debate.
BUDGET MONITORING	Improved understanding of Council's financial position was achieved during the year.

Case Study: ASB in City Centre

Looking Ahead to 2026-2027

**June
2024**

Scrutiny request from Councillors Michael Mitchell and Tammy Palmer.

**September
2024**

Scrutiny Programme Board allocated to the Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee.

**January
2025**

Following a unanimous vote ASB in the City Centre, its causes and possible solutions was added to the work plan.

**25 Sept
2025**

Great session of Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee. Agreement that the Community Safety Partnership would report back in a years' time. Evidence was provided by 4 external agencies, including Inclusive Exeter, and young people from a local secondary school.

Recommendation

Councillor Moore proposed, seconded by Councillor Read that the concerns of inclusive Exeter be presented to the police and DCC and formally to ECC regarding how we better work with our diverse communities and following a unanimous vote, was CARRIED.

Since September 2025:

As a direct result of this scrutiny session the police have prioritised meeting business owners in Sidwell Street to build relationships with diverse communities.

The Community Safety Partnership will report to Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee in September 2026

The Scrutiny Programme Board will continue to support the scrutiny committees to agree the format and content of the work programme held on the Scrutiny Work Schedule, a working document which is reported on at each Board meeting.

A copy of the Scrutiny Work Schedule is attached to each Scrutiny Committee agenda.

The coming year brings the following items already scheduled to be heard before scrutiny committees:

Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee – regular Budget scrutiny, Evaluation of the Commercialisation Strategy, Progress on new strategy to end Homelessness, Reducing the number of empty homes in Exeter and Community Safety Partnership Update.

Strategic Scrutiny Committee – regular Live & Move programme update, Air Quality, Bike Parking and Net Zero items.

The Forward Plan is circulated to Members and is available on the Council Website.

The following topics will be scrutinised:

- Rivers Transparency
- Unadopted roads/management companies
- Bike Parking
- Draft Homelessness Strategy
- Community Safety Partnership Report
- Commercialisation strategy
- Budget
- Tenants Energy Review of Passivhaus Council Homes
- Reducing the number of empty homes in Exeter
- Key People Activity Across the Council
- Air Quality
- Net Zero